



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

December 21, 2005

# News Release

## **7 MEXICAN NATIONALS ARRAIGNED FOR OPERATING FRAUDULENT DOCUMENT RING**

CHICAGO — Seven illegal aliens from Mexico were arraigned here in state court Tuesday for allegedly operating a fraudulent document ring in Chicago's "Little Village" area that generated approximately \$2.5 million a year, following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Sergio Ramirez-Ramirez, 29, Gerardo Salazar-Rodriguez, 32, Victorino Aparicio-Lopez, 27, Gerardo Jimenez-Moran, 29, Raul Hernandez-Cervantes, 43, Gabriel Rojas-Ramirez, 24, and Manuel Leija-Sanchez, 38, were arraigned and had bond set yesterday in Branch 98 at the Cook County Courthouse at 26<sup>th</sup> and California and have all been charged with felony forgery.

The Cicero Police Department and ICE agents arrested all seven men Nov. 15 at a residence on S. Lombard Ave. in Cicero, Ill. Found inside the residence was equipment used for making fake government documents, including: five high-speed computers, printers, I.D. card printers, scanners, laminating pouches, foil strips with security features, dozens of counterfeit identification cards, and other document-making paraphernalia. The estimated value of the seized items is approximately \$10,000; the street value of the software is believed to be about \$100,000.

Since the early 1990's making and selling fraudulent government identity documents has skyrocketed in Chicago's "Little Village" neighborhood along West 26th St. Cook County State's Attorney Richard A. Devine is working with ICE agents to facilitate prosecuting these counterfeit document vendors.

Manuel Leija-Sanchez is believed to be the current head of the Chicago Cell of the Castorena crime family, a Mexican organized crime family that has controlled the majority of the fraudulent document manufacturing and sales trade in the U.S. over the past 10 years. Pedro Castorena-Ibarra, the leader of the Castorena crime family and one of ICE's top 10 most wanted fugitives, is currently under indictment in Denver, Colo., for Money Laundering, Fraud, and the Manufacture of Counterfeit Identity Documents. Leija's criminal history includes multiple arrests for selling counterfeit documents, as well as arrests for narcotics and assault.

"ICE places a high priority on investigating identity fraud and document fraud cases," said Gary Hartwig, acting special agent-in-charge of the ICE Chicago Office of Investigations. "Counterfeit documents create the illusion of legitimacy and allow dangerous criminals to hide in plain sight. ICE is committed to shutting down illegal enterprises that compromise the security of our nation."

"The production and sale of these fraudulent documents is corrupting many of our neighborhoods," Devine said. "That these highly organized criminals have been brought to justice is a credit to the law enforcement agencies involved."

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*